

VZCZCXRO8334
OO RUEHAG RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHKUK RUEHROV
DE RUEHLB #3618/01 3181434
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 141434Z NOV 06
FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6448
INFO RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO PRIORITY 0512
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
RHMFISS/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BEIRUT 003618

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

NSC FOR ABRAMS/DORAN/MARCHESE/HARDING

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/09/2106
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [SY](#) [LE](#) [IS](#)
SUBJECT: LEBANON: DOD A/S RODMAN DISCUSSES SECURITY
ASSISTANCE WITH PM SINIORA

Classified By: Ambassador Jeffrey D. Feltman. Reason: Section 1.4 (b).

SUMMARY

11. (C) PM Siniora expressed his appreciation for Assistant Secretary Rodman's message that U.S. security assistance for

SIPDIS

Lebanon will remain solid due to the bi-partisan support that Lebanon's pro-reform forces enjoy in Congress. A/S Rodman also assured Siniora that the U.S. is not about to engage with Syria to the detriment of Lebanon, and stated that this position is shared by most of the Arab regimes he has spoken with in the region. A/S Rodman informed Siniora that his discussions with Lebanon's Defense Minister and Army Commander were productive and would help the U.S., in coordination with other donor countries, determine the optimum mix of training and equipment to rapidly and comprehensively improve the capabilities of the LAF. PM Siniora said he understood the need for a "coordination mechanism" to produce the greatest progress, but cautioned A/S Rodman that the Lebanese Army was just now emerging from a period of enforced passivity and would require long term assistance in matters pertaining to modernization. The Prime Minister also discussed broad regional issues, notably the Middle East Peace Process, Lebanon's relations with Syria and Shebaa Farms, and urged the U.S. to use its influence to create movement on these matters, not just for stability in Lebanon, but also for Israel's long term security, and an improved image for America in the Arab and Islamic world. End summary.

12. (SBU) U.S. Assistant Secretary of Defense for Internal Security Affairs Peter W. Rodman and the Ambassador met with Prime Minister Fouad Siniora at the Serail Palace in Beirut late on November 9. Prime Minister Siniora was joined by Lebanon's Ambassador-designate to the U.S. Antoine Chedid, senior advisor Mohammed Chatah, military advisor LAF General Saad Eid, and advisor Rola Nouraddine. A/S Rodman and the Ambassador were joined by Paul Hulley, Director, Middle East North Africa, Office of the Secretary of Defense, Mara Karlin, Levant Director, Office of the Secretary of Defense - Policy, and Emboff (notetaker).

13. (C) PM Siniora came to the meeting fresh from the third session of "national consultations" in which Lebanon's diverse political factions are attempting to resolve the long-standing dispute of the Lahoud presidency and the role of government outsider and leader of the powerful Free Patriotic Movement, Michel Aoun. Siniora appeared confident

and at one point assured his guests that Hizballah will not be successful in its effort to leverage its self-declared "divine victory" into a controlling position in his government. Siniora indicated the consultations were scheduled to resume this Saturday and he may postpone planned travel next week if the talks made progress.

SECURITY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM WILL NOT CHANGE

¶4. (C) A/S Rodman stated it was time to back up rhetorical support with tangible equipment and training assistance. He told the Prime Minister that his discussions with Lebanon's defense leaders were detailed and helpful in refining priorities and timelines. A/S Rodman also assured PM Siniora that U.S. support to pro-reform elements in Lebanon, including its security forces, had solid bipartisan support in Congress and could be relied upon. He stated that, of course, the U.S. could not be expected to meet all the massive training and equipment needs of the Lebanese Armed Forces, but based upon his extensive consultations with other donor countries in the region, he was confident that as long as Lebanon continued on its democratic trajectory, the modernization objectives would be achieved. A/S Rodman stated the U.S. would continue to encourage both the EU and Lebanon's regional allies to provide a comprehensive, coordinated package of security assistance.

¶5. (C) As the embodiment of Lebanon's national sovereignty, the LAF carried an enormous constitutional responsibility, and PM Siniora asked the U.S. and Lebanon's other allies to proceed as quickly and comprehensively as possible. PM Siniora implied that a modern, fully capable LAF would be a guarantor of stability not only for Lebanon, but for the region, because it would enable the disarmament of the highly destabilizing militia of Hizballah.

BEIRUT 00003618 002 OF 003

¶6. (C) In response, the Assistant Secretary said he understood the urgency of the situation and was instructing his staff to expedite the process wherever possible. In a related matter, A/S Rodman also explained that, despite some stories to the contrary, the U.S. was not about engage with the Syrian regime to the detriment of Lebanon. He emphasized that the U.S. was not pleased with Syria and its destabilizing activities in both Iraq and Lebanon, and as a result, Syria would face a very difficult task in convincing the U.S. it had truly changed its course.

LAF'S EXPANSION REQUIRES MASSIVE ASSISTANCE

¶7. (C) PM Siniora said he was gratified by the size and specificity of the U.S. security assistance package thus far, but emphasized that nearly 30 years of working under Syrian control had decimated the LAF, not only materially, but in terms of initiative and confidence. He asked the Assistant Secretary to keep this in mind when formulating the follow-on

SIPDIS
phases of the security assistance program. Siniora said that focused training programs and working closely with the enhanced UNIFIL forces in south Lebanon would transform the LAF, because Lebanese officers and soldiers would be able to see up close how democratically-committed military forces operate to protect a nation's sovereignty and its citizens.

¶8. (C) Siniora confided that one of his primary objectives in so adamantly pursuing the massive LAF deployment to south Lebanon at the end of the July-August conflict was that it would inevitably "drain the water from the stream in which Hizballah swims." He implied that with both a capable, motivated LAF and a highly professional UNIFIL in the south, it would reduce the operating space that Hizballah had previously enjoyed and exploited. Siniora said that over the

past several months, both the LAF and the Internal Security Forces (ISF) had grown 25 percent by adding some 20,000 new troops. But he cautioned that such rapid expansion could not be sustained unless Lebanon's friends continued, and even increased, their considerable security assistance. Siniora conceded a fully trained LAF would take time, but also pointed out that each step forward in capability and confidence would result in measurable improvements in Lebanon's security and sovereignty.

¶9. (C) PM Siniora proudly stated that the LAF now patrols the entire border of the country and were gradually earning the respect and confidence of the Lebanese people. Starting with a force that sometimes even lacked rifles, Siniora said the LAF were steadily learning from UNIFIL and would advance even more rapidly once the various international training programs are initiated. The Prime Minister said he understood A/S Rodman's call for a "donor assistance coordination mechanism" to ensure that diverse international assistance was properly sequenced and balanced against actual needs. Although PM Siniora did not commit to a specific mechanism, he stated that he understood the requirement and would address it.

SINIORA ADDRESSES BROADER SECURITY ISSUES

¶10. (C) As he has with other recent U.S. visitors, PM Siniora urged A/S Rodman to focus not only on the nuts and bolts of assistance, but to also consider Lebanese and regional security issues that, in his view, would determine the success of democracy and political moderation in the Middle East. Most important in his estimation is the critical need to have some movement on the Middle East peace process. He emphasized that both the Arab and Islamic worlds were "humiliated on a daily basis" and the lack of redress was, in his eyes, producing extremely fertile ground for extremism and a harsh anti-Western political climate.

¶11. (C) Not unexpectedly, Siniora used the latest incident in Gaza as a prime example of the spiral of violence that could engulf the region if some form of relief did not soon surface. Siniora said he understood the complexities and pitfalls of any genuine peace process, but passionately asked, "What alternative do we really have?" Siniora described the present regional stalemate as a recipe for disaster, not only for Arab moderates and democrats, but for long term inter-religious relations, and for Western interests.

¶12. (C) The Prime Minister next raised the always-present

BEIRUT 00003618 003 OF 003

issue of Shebaa Farms. As he has stated on numerous discussions, PM Siniora strongly argued that Shebaa was a strategically unimportant piece of land that was unnecessarily prolonging the "occupation" debate in Lebanon and giving the troublesome regimes in Syria and Iran a valuable gift by allowing President Bashar al-Asad to incessantly criticize the Siniora government as weak and incompetent.

¶13. (C) As he repeatedly argued in last summer's 1701 negotiations, Siniora countered Israel's concern that concessions on Shebaa would be viewed as a Hizballah victory with the contention that continued Israeli presence in Shebaa was an even more valuable "gift" to Hassan Nasrallah. Siniora urged the U.S. to convince Israel that it could safely transfer control of Shebaa to UN authority without giving Hizballah any strategic or political advantage. He implied, again as he has on previous occasions, that UN stewardship could last almost indefinitely, especially considering that Syria's recognition that the land was Lebanese was constantly shifting and would require sustained bi-lateral negotiations.

¶14. (C) PM Siniora asserted that without Shebaa Farms, the entire rationale of Hizballah's "resistance" would crumble. Siniora acknowledged that Nasrallah and company might shift their demands if Shebaa was resolved, but the Prime Minister said that to do so, such a shift would unveil Hizballah for what it currently is -- an Iranian proxy.

¶15. (C) Not only would settlement of the Shebaa issue expose Hizballah and force it to decide whether its allegiance lay with Lebanon or Iran, but removal of the deeply-felt grievance would, he argued, finally give Israel the security along its northern border that it had sought for decades. PM Siniora said if anything could be learned from the six wars fought on Lebanon's territory since 1948, it was that violence only resulted in more violence. He rhetorically asked how much more force could Israel actually use against Hizballah. Certainly, he admitted, it could use even more overwhelming force, but to what end, and at what cost. He asked whether Israel really wanted to go down that road.

¶16. (C) Lastly, PM Siniora addressed the issue of relations with Syria. He implied that the U.S. really doesn't understand the necessity of Lebanon having good relations with Syria and asked the U.S. to have patience as Lebanon gradually, but steadily, asserted its sovereign rights in a manner that had the greatest chance of success. He stated, "Syria has to get used to the fact that we are an independent people," and added that relations between the two countries was not only desirable, but unavoidable. Siniora noted that the Syrian regime was under intense pressure, both from the international community and the steadily advancing UNIIIC investigation, and he welcomed this pressure because, in his view, it would inevitably force them to reconsider their recalcitrant international behavior.

¶17. (C) In closing, Prime Minister Siniora sincerely thanked the U.S. for standing by his government and Lebanon's pro-reform forces. Having just left the rancorous "national consultations," PM Siniora admitted that Lebanon was facing difficult days, but he expressed strong confidence that with perseverance, democratic forces would prevail. He proudly recounted the successes of his pro-reform government during and since last summer's conflict and boldly stated that they were not affected by the steady barrage of criticism from Aoun, Syria and Hizballah. Siniora assured his guests that Nasrallah had badly miscalculated if he thought Hizballah's hollow "divine victory" could somehow be parlayed into dominant control of the government. The Prime Minister finished by urging the U.S. to steadfastly use its influence for stability and peace in the region, because it would be the deciding factor.

¶18. (U) This cable has been cleared by A/S Rodman.
FELTMAN